CONSUMERS' PREFERENCES AND ATTITUDES ON THE MARKET OF THE TRADITIONAL HUNGARIAN FOODS

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ABSTRACT

An overall quantitative market research was carried out to reveal the consumers' behaviour relating to traditional Hungarian foods. This research aimed to get information on the consumption and buying habits of Hungarian consumers as well as the preferences and attitudes connected to these products.

The research was based on a 1000 questionnaires inquiry that was representative and random. The sample mirrors the population in five factors: region, type of settlement, sex, age and educational level.

Data were analyzed by using frequency distribution, means and cross-tables. Chi-square test was used in case of percentage distribution to define the level of significance and ANOVA in case of multivariate statistical analysis.

The research revealed that the category of traditional Hungarian food is more obvious for the consumers than hungaricum is. According to the results, the most known hungaricums are Pick salami, Szegedi paprika, Gyulai sausage and Makó onion. It was found that hungaricums are part of daily nutrition of most of the people. In their shopping decisions the consumers regard flavour as the most important factor; which indicates the primary importance of enjoyment value of this type of food above any other factors. Concerning quality issues, the consumers' expectations towars food security aspects, such as the freshness of the product and legal requirements were listed as most important factors. The results show that this group of products enjoys a kind of status of trust, which is reasonable to exploit in communication messages. Six different consumer groups were determined with factor and cluster analysis by using life style variables.

Research Work

1. INTRODUCTION

The theme of the research is actual, because after the EU-accession of Hungary, the producers of agricultural products faced hard market circumstances, *strong competition of the concurrences and importer companies*. A possible development strategy is to strengthen the position of the segments belonging to the competitive sphere. Another opportunity is given by such sectors that do not belong directly to the competitive sphere, and *bear specific, significant tradition in the Hungarian history*, which are targets of the developments within environmental and landscape management, tourism, employment, rural areas and income supplement measures, as well. Sustaining or improving market shares is possible with recognising and strengthening the values of native, traditional and county specific animal and plant species and products (hungaricums) (KOVÁCS et al, 2003).

The word hungaricum is used by many and in several aspects, although it has not been exactly defined. It is used in relation with not only food, but all of those products that are in relationship with Hungary or Hungarian traditions. Even a "threshold limit" has not been determined, any producers can decide on referring their products to as hungaricum. Contrary, traditional Hungarian food is "any animals or plants or food products of these origin that is connected to Hungarian producing culture, knowledge or tradition formed by the generations of Hungarian people and which is acknowledged by the Hungarian population or at least by the population of a region as Hungarian product, as being typical for Hungarians and well-known, and also it is internationally accepted as Hungarian speciality" (ANDRÁSFALVY, 2003).

Based on the earlier studies on traditional Hungarian foods (POPOVICS and GYENGE, 2006; NÓTÁRI, 2008), the aim of the survey was to get detailed information on the Hungarian consumers' consuming and purchasing habits and their preferences and attitudes related to traditional products.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

Countrywide, altogether 1000 personal interviews were done at the homes of the interviewed people. The sampling was based on the *random walking* technique, which ensures the stochastic theory in the selection of the interviewed people. The so called *birthday key* was used to choose the person for the interview. In order to ensure representativeness, the sample was corrected by multidimensional weighing (gender, age, qualification), thus the sample is representative for the basic population according to five dimensions (region, type of settlement, gender, age, qualification).

The *majority* of the questions were *closed ones*, but in order to get information on the opinion of the people *several open questions*.

Data processing and displaying the results were based on SPSS version 13.0. The tables show the *relative frequencies* of the whole population. In case of *scale-type questions* (mostly the grades varied from 1 to 5, where 1 means the poorest 5 the best value; in one case from -2 to +2 representing the direction of influence) mean scores and ratios were calculated. In case of other questions, the dates were presented in *cross-tables* and expressed in ratios, where *Chi-square test* was used to test the difference and to define the level of significance. The multivariable statistical analysis was based on *ANOVA*. *Factor and cluster analysis* of the living variables were used to define the six segments of the population.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Reputation of the definitions hungaricum and traditional Hungarian food

The first block of the questionnaire analysed the interpretation of the definitions *traditional Hungarian food* and the similarly used *hungaricum by consumers*. Within this, first the spontaneous reputation of these definitions was surveyed. The first four questions were also filtering questions, because if somebody did not understand the expression of traditional Hungarian food or hungaricum, was not asked to continuo the interview.

The great majority (85.2%) of the interviewed people has heard about hungaricums; it was un-known by only 14.8 per cent of them. The definiteness of the opinions is reflected by the fact that none of them gave an answer "does not know or does not answer".

The next question analysed *the associations of the interviewees in relation with hungaricum*, what stereotypes or ideas the consumers have in their mind.

The ideas on the definition of hungaricum were similar; it means something that is Hungarian, it means a product that is in connection with Hungary and the Hungarian traditions. It was however also obvious that the people have not got more exact definitions. This is also proved by that most of the interviewees could not point out further categories beyond the one "something Hungarian" listed at first place (82.6%), while a third category was given by only 16 (1.6%) people. The high number of foods mentioned in this group reflects on that the image of hungaricum is closer to foodstuff. Some one fifth (18.7%) of the interviewees could not give any answer on the definition; this means that many people do not understand the definition, despite of hearing about it.

Next question asked on the awareness of the expression traditional Hungarian food. Almost 95 per cent of the interviewees have information on the expression, which is almost 10 per cent higher than in case of hungaricum. The differentiation of these definitions can be useful in the communication strategy.

The category of traditional Hungarian food is more obvious for the consumers than hungaricum is. The number of those that could not define it was only half (9.8%) of that of hungaricums. However, much more of them gave two positive answers. Those aspects were listed at first place that reflect on Hungarian origin, traditional production and generation-old recipes. These were followed by the expectations towards Hungarian raw materials; and at the end stereotypes in connection with Hungary (paprika, goulash) and demand for locality were listed.

Then, *names of well-known traditional Hungarian food products were asked*. The first third of the answers gave such names as Pick salami, Szegedi paprika, Gyulai sausage or Makó onion. Only one general product was listed (paprika), although both typical types (Szeged, Kalocsa) of it were given here as well. These were more frequently followed by more general product names, such as wines, sausage and palinka. In the category of other products, such products were listed that have local importance but are not known countrywide.

3.2. Consumption and purchase of traditional Hungarian foods

Majority of the interviewed (96.6%) usually consumes traditional Hungarian foods. This means that these sorts of products are part of daily nutrition of most of the people. Almost all of those who do not consume Hungarian food products indicated the higher price as the reason. However, they represent only 3.1% of the population.

The consumption *frequencies of traditional foods* are shown in **Table 1**.

It is seen that those who consume these products do it quite frequently. 58.1 per cent of them have such food 2 to 3 times per week. If we also consider those with weekly frequency, the share of these two groups is 76.1 per cent.

Table 1. Frequency of consumption by categories of product-consumptions (N=966)

Frequency category	Number and percentage of answers	
	head	%
Daily	302	31.3
2-3 times per week	259	26.8
Weekly	173	17.9
2-3 times per month	136	14.1
Monthly	50	5.2
Rarely than monthly	46	4.8

Table 2 summarises the results of the given answers on the questions *on buying places of traditional Hungarian foods*. (The interviewed might give more than one answers.)

Table 2. Buying places of traditional Hungarian foods according to their consumers (N=966)

Nomination	Number and percentage of answers	
	head	%
Smaller food shops	440	45.7
Hypermarket	417	43.3
Supermarket	408	42.4
Directly from producer	145	15.1
Discount store	138	14.3
Own produced by family	61	6.3
Other	33	3.4
Does not buy	9	0.9

The highest frequency is seen in case of smaller shops as buying place. It was closely followed by hypermarkets and supermarkets. Smaller part of the consumers buys these products directly from producers or from discount stores. In the category of other places, buying on markets was mentioned with only one exception.

It was also found that more than half of the interviewed people are *willing to pay higher price for traditional Hungarian food products*, although the ratio of those who will not pay more is high (41.0%).

Those who are willing to pay higher price for traditional products than that of mass products *were asked about the percentage of this extra price in case of 10 different product groups*. The results are shown by **Table 3** and **Table 4**.

The majority of the consumers is willing to pay maximum 10% extra price for the traditional Hungarian products. Relatively small is the ration of those who would pay more. Most of them are willing to pay 10% more for mineral waters and bakery products, least of them for wines and liquor.

Table 3. Acceptable additional price in case of different product groups (N=548)

Product group	Willingness for paying extra price, %													
	<10		<20		<30		<40		<50		>50		Not know/ans	
	head	%	head	%	head	%	head	%	head	%	head	%	head	%
Milk products	357	65.1	132	24.1	32	5.8	4	0.7	4	0.7	1	0.2	18	3.3
Meat products	300	54.7	161	29.4	46	8.4	12	2.2	8	1.5	6	1.1	15	2.7
Fruit and vegetable	322	58.8	139	25.4	48	8.8	8	1.5	9	1.6	3	0.5	19	3.5
Mineral water	381	69.5	83	15.1	26	4.7	4	0.7	3	0.5	2	0.4	49	8.9
Wine	283	51.6	106	19.3	66	12.0	13	2.4	11	2.0	7	1.3	62	11.3
Liquors	283	51.6	108	19.7	48	8.8	13	2.4	10	1.8	4	0.7	82	15.0
Spices	306	55.8	140	25.5	58	10.6	6	1.1	12	2.2	4	0.7	22	4.0
Preserved fruit and jam	328	59.9	115	21.0	46	8.4	6	1.1	9	1.6	3	0.5	41	7.5
Sweets	349	63.7	98	17.9	41	7.5	8	1.5	8	1.5	2	0.4	42	7.7
Bakery products	373	68.1	105	19.2	26	4.7	5	0.9	8	1.5	5	0.9	26	4.7

If the percentage figures of the extra price is marked with rank numbers (<10% = 1 ... >50% = 6), the order is different (**Table 4**).

Table 4. Main statistical descriptives of extra price dates

Product group	n	Mean	Deviation	Mode
Wine	486	1.73	1.09	1
Meat products	533	1.66	0.97	1
Liquor	466	1.65	1.02	1
Spices	526	1.65	0.97	1
Fruit and vegetable	529	1.59	0.91	1
Preserved fruit and jam	507	1.54	0.91	1
Sweets	506	1.49	0.88	1
Bakery products	522	1.44	0.88	1
Milk products	530	1.43	0.74	1
Mineral water	499	1.34	0.73	1

In this case, people would pay the highest extra price for wines and the lowest for mineral waters. With other words, typically, people would pay only 10% more for bakery products, milk products and mineral water, while for alcoholic drinks, people would pay even higher extra price.

In the following, the role of *18 different influencing factors was analysed on the buying decisions in case of commerce products and traditional Hungarian products*. The results of the analysis on traditional foods are shown in **Table 5**. The factors were given marks from -2 to +2.

Table 5. Main statistics of factors influencing the purchase of traditional Hungarian foods

Influencing factor	N	Mean	Deviation	Mode
Flavour of the product	965	1.68	0.58	2
Stable quality of the product	965	1.65	0.66	2
Likes all family	960	1.55	0.68	2
Quality trademark	966	1.53	0.73	2
Hungarian producer in Hungary	963	1.49	0.77	2
Trademark on traditional production	965	1.41	0.77	2
Aesthetics and appearance of the product	965	1.39	0.75	2
Brand-name	965	1.36	0.81	2
Health promoting effect of the product	964	1.27	0.84	2
Name of the producing company	965	1.22	0.86	2
Habits	962	1.22	0.85	2
Practical, easy-to-handle packaging	966	1.11	0.86	2
Indicating the region of origin	959	1.10	0.92	2
Price of the product	964	1.06	1.17	2
Available anywhere	961	1.00	0.94	2
Advertisement of the product	956	0.41	0.94	0
International producer in Hungary	956	-0.41	1.23	0
Import product	958	-0.75	1.22	-2

In comparison with ordinary foods, the most important factor was the flavour (as opposite with quality and family preferences); which indicates the primary importance of enjoyment value above any other factors. These are followed by such factors coming from the traditionalism of these products, as quality warranty, Hungarian producer, labelling proving traditional production. Healthiness of the product takes the same position (9^{th} place) as that of the ordinary foods, however with much more positive influence (1.27 vs. 1.02). Indicating the place of origin is a less important factor (13^{th} place), although with almost twice as high figure than in case of food produced industrially (1.10 vs. 0.69). Similarly to ordinary foods, two factors were indicated with negative figures: international producer and import products.

3.3. Components of quality, labelling, trademarks

The questions of the following block analysed the *components of quality, labelling and trademarks*. Firstly, *18 different factors and aspects influencing potentially the image of traditional products were analysed* (the scores from 1 to 5 indicate the importance – 1 is least, 5 is most important). The results are shown in **Table 6**.

Table 6. Importance of different factors determining the quality image of traditional Hungarian foods

Statement	N	Mean	Deviation	Mode
Unobjectionable freshness of the product.	996	4.74	0.60	5
Production should fulfil the legal requirements (e.g. hygiene)	993	4.73	0.57	5
Always the same flavour.	995	4.69	0.66	5
Should be made of natural raw materials.	993	4.67	0.66	5
Should be made of chemical-free raw materials.	991	4.67	0.67	5
Should be made of raw materials of domestic origin.	993	4.59	0.75	5
Should bear high enjoyment value.	993	4.56	0.70	5
Obvious identification of the producer.	992	4.54	0.79	5
Label warranting the domestic origin.	993	4.54	0.76	5
Recipe inherited from earlier generation.	988	4.54	0.78	5
Should be nutritious.	995	4.53	0.75	5
Should not contain E- numbered additives.	985	4.52	0.79	5
Warranty on traditional processing.	987	4.47	0.83	5
Brand-name should indicate Hungarian origin.	988	4.43	0.84	5
Hungarian producer and production.	989	4.40	0.87	5
Packaging should refer traditionalism.	987	4.28	0.90	5
Practical, easy-to-handle packaging.	991	4.15	0.93	5
Fast preparation, time sparing.	987	3.76	1.20	5

At the beginning of the list, food security aspects stand, such as freshness and fulfilling legal requirements. The reason for this can be the food scandals of the last years, and the fear from these is reflected in the answers. Then, the expectations towards the flavour typical for this product group follows. Afterwards, the natural and chemical-free raw materials stand, which are important in case of ordinary foods. According to the results, these are even more important than the domestic origin of raw materials, which also reflects on the importance of food security issues. Then, enjoyment value as important factor follows. At the beginning of the middle field, the importance of identifiability of the product: warranty of home origin and the obvious identification of the producer. It is also important to mention that all these factors have around the same weight: between the averages of the first and the tenth rank, the difference is only 0.2. Besides, the deviations are also relatively low (around 10 to 12 per cent), which reflects on the univocal judgment on these aspects. The results of the answers given on the last questions mean that the Hungarian consumers consider brand-name indicative of Hungarian origin and the type of packaging less important, which reflects on the higher importance of rational rather than emotional aspects. According to the answers of the consumers, the traditional foods are not typically fast food products and do not bear time sparing function.

The next question asked about the possible advantages of a *trademark of traditional products for consumers* on products without such labelling.

Around 80 per cent of the interviewed people would decide in favour of traditional Hungarian foods with trademark. However, the percentage (43.6%) of those who are willing to pay more for those traditional Hungarian foods with trademark is much lower. From one side, it reflects on the price sensitivity of the Hungarian consumers, and on the lack of strategy of this product category, from other side.

Those that are willing to pay higher price for traditional foods with trademark (N=436) *were asked to give the percentage of acceptable extra price in case of ten different product groups.*

Similarly to the earlier seen (Table 3 and 4), the majority of the people would pay less than 10 per cent. Most of them would pay more than 10 per cent for mineral waters and bakery products, while least of them for alcoholic drinks and meat products. The rank numbers (<10% = 1 ... >50% = 6) resulted different composition again. The first three places were taken by alcoholic drinks and meat products, while the last ones by bakery products and mineral waters, for the same reason as it was discussed in the previous.

3.4. Communication

In this block of the questions, the *information sources* of the consumers on ordinary foods were asked.

The order of the ranks is led by the nationwide television broadcasts. These are immediately followed by two reliable types of sources (friends, family). This reflects on that the information coming from mass medium is strongly filtered (by family, friends) and the reliability of the information is prejudged in this way. The results also show that this group of products enjoys a kind of status of trust. This information source is followed by advertisements, radio and Internet. Interestingly enough, local gazettes overtook the nationwide ones and the local televisions, as well. Informational books and local radios close the order. As other sources of information, leaflets and information given in the shops were mentioned in significant number.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the results of the survey, the Hungarian consumers are more familiar with the definition of traditional foods and have better understanding of it; therefore it is recommended to use it in marketing communication. In order to better identify this product group, it is useful to create a unique labelling (trademark), which helps the consumers to get adequate information, and also stands as warranty of the product group. This trademark can promote the cooperation of the producers of traditional Hungarian foods, which may result is a better bargaining position. The information gained by the survey ensures opportunity for the foundation of a more effective marketing and an extensive reputation of this product group. Besides, these kinds of information may contribute to a general common marketing strategy, which will be a good guideline to create marketing strategy for certain product or product group in Hungary.

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